

Guard seeks to ease land-swap concerns

Opponents marshal forces in hope of derailing plan

BY AL WINN
Of Our Lebanon Bureau

FORT INDIANTOWN GAP • Pennsylvania National Guard officials are hoping a public meeting Thursday can help calm objections to a proposed land swap that would add 1,800 acres on the north side of Second Mountain to Fort Indiantown Gap.

In the meantime, some of those

objecting are mobilizing their forces in the hope of derailing the proposal.

The meeting will probably be the last public meeting on the proposal, with the National Guard deciding in the next few months whether to go ahead with it.

Under the proposed deal, the National Guard would obtain a seven-mile strip of land between Cold Spring Road and Middle Paxton Twp. from the Game Commission. To get the land, Guard officials said they will buy 1,800 acres upstream from DeHart Reservoir from Harris-

burg and turn it over to the Game Commission. That land would link state gamelands 211 and 210, creating the largest single game area in the state, said Game Commission spokesman Jerry Feaser.

The amount Harrisburg would get from the deal hasn't been determined, said National Guard spokesman Lt. Col. Chris Cleaver, but it would come from the \$5 million the Guard has in its capital budget to cover costs of the swap.

That land the Game Commission would acquire from Harrisburg is already open to hunting.

MEETING PLANNED

A public meeting on the proposed land swap will take place at 6 p.m. Thursday at the Fort Indiantown Gap community club, across Fisher Avenue from the Military Headquarters building. National Guard, U.S. Fish and Wildlife and National Park Service officials will be there.

The land the Guard wants on Second Mountain would serve as a buffer zone for firing ranges on the south side of the mountain so errant shells wouldn't fall on hunters or

hikers. One such range was cleared on the mountain's south slope last spring.

Besides having a poorly aimed shell occasionally land in the buffer zone, the Guard would not touch the land. "The way that land is now it will be in the future," Cleaver said.

"Do you believe that?" asked Joshua McKinney of Dauphin last week. McKinney doesn't. "[The National Guard] needs the land for expanded training ranges," he told a

Please see SWAP on Back Page

B16 THE PATRIOT-NEWS TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2004

SWAP: Meeting to address concerns about land plan

Continued from Page B1

group at the Dauphin-Middle Paxton Historical Society.

Opposition from McKinney and others has less to do with what Guard officials say they are going to do than with what opponents think they will do.

"I just don't trust them," said Jim Rice, another oppo-

nent at the Dauphin meeting.

Cleaver said Guard officials would offer some proposals they hope will alleviate concerns expressed by people at a public meeting in May.

"We've looked at different options and will announce some different programs," he said. Some of the proposals would have to do with improved access to the lands

within the proposed buffer zone, but Cleaver said he wouldn't be more specific before the meeting.

The National Guard still hasn't made a decision on whether to go ahead with the swap. Nor has it made a formal proposal to the Pennsylvania Game Commission. But Cleaver said a decision could come in time for the Game

Commission board to consider it at its January meeting.

If no formal proposal has been made to the Game Commission board, discussions with commission staff have been going on for some time.

The Guard proposed acquiring up to 8,000 acres in Gamelands 211. At that point, the National Guard had in mind more than just a buffer zone, Cleaver said.

He said the Guard backed away from the idea because of the popularity of the gamelands area and because of objections from Game Commission staff.

Game Commission staff do not have the final word on what sort of deal gets approved, Feaser said, but may make recommendations to the commission board.

Some opponents liken the

fight against the Guard's land swap proposal to the ultimately successful 1970s fight to prevent PPL Corp. from building a dam on Stony Creek.

Rice is a veteran of that fight.

"We still have 6,000 'Save Stony Creek Valley' bumper stickers," he said.

AL WINN: 272-3759 or
awinn@patriot-news.com